

# Introduction

Of all the genealogical sources of contemporary critical theory, in both its German- and French-inspired variants, early German Romanticism remains the most potent, yet it is also the least explicated in relation to current theoretical trends.\* The sources of modern criticism in Jena Romanticism are widely acknowledged, yet when theory parades as a post-philosophical genre, it largely does so in one of two main post-Hegelian modes: the dialectical and anti-dialectical critiques of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Schlegel's insertion of a literary history of the moderns into the context of Kant's 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgment-Power', to produce 'a historical philosophy of art' (*eine historische Philosophie der Kunst*),<sup>2</sup> is recognized as formative for literary theory, but its more general-theoretical significance is still largely unexplored (or at least since the decline of deconstruction).

In particular, Schlegel's idea has yet to be systematically connected up to the idea of transdisciplinarity, which increasingly impinges on the methodological self-consciousness of a wide array of general-theoretical practices in the arts and humanities, having been imported from Education, and Science and Technology Studies, whence the self-conscious, but narrowly technocratic, formulation of its idea derives. From the standpoint of the prevalent (and bureaucratically convergent), technocratic and 'creative' (art school and cultural-industrial) discourses on transdisciplinarity, in fact, philosophical Romanticism is more or less invisible. Ironically, perhaps, because it is precisely the heritage of a 'bad' Romanticism of the artist as creator that the idea is being deployed to recode.

The constantly repeated self-historicization of the dominant, technocratic idea of transdisciplinary, as

the product of a state-led reorganization of knowledges, rarely ventures back beyond the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> This is primarily a result of an exclusive focus on knowledge production as a 'research process' orientated to 'real world' problems, to the neglect of concept construction, critique and conceptual meaning. Yet the relevant debates about the unity of the system of relations between academic disciplines date back to the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries (paradigmatically, in Germany), a period in which they were at once explicitly philosophical and institutional in character – as the article by Howard Caygill in this dossier indicates, with regard to the intellectual background to the founding of the University of Berlin. There is thus considerable scope (and one might hold out some hope) for a productive engagement of early Romanticism with the transdisciplinary problematic, in its broader sense. Indeed, might the conceptual form of transdisciplinarity most appropriate to the arts and humanities be something structurally akin to that of early Romanticism itself?

The relevance and resonance of early German Romanticism here are in part a product of its philosophical position 'between Kant and Hegel', and their transcendental and dialectical constructions of the relations between the disciplines, respectively; in part a product of Jena Romanticism's historical self-consciousness of the cultural consequences and aporias of its modernity; and in part a result of the privileged metaphysical status of the generic concept of art, lurking beneath the Romantic idea of literature/*Poesie* (for which, see David Cunningham's article, below).

The first two of these reasons are closely linked in so far as the modernity they represent is that

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of a self-consciousness of both (i) the necessity of positivity (as well as transcendence) to the experience of truth and (ii) the restless subjectivity of interest (*Interesse*), which fractures any attempt to actualize the universality of classical ideals (beauty, in particular) under ‘modern’ conditions: then, bourgeois; now, more purely capitalistic.

This decisive historical self-consciousness may be traced back to Friedrich Schelegel’s rethinking – and resolution – of the terms of the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, in the wake of the French Revolution, in his early *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (1795–7). In the theory debates of the last fifty years, though, conflicting cultural periodizations and historical positions – within the Romantic modern – have taken on a more fine-grained cast, appearing as what we might call a Quarrel of the Prefixes: Inter, Post and Trans. It is within the theoretical imaginary of this cultural-historical field that the idea of transdisciplinarity acquires its broader coordinates, linking it to the ‘forever becoming never perfected’ ‘kind that is more than a kind’, which is the Romantic conception of art.<sup>4</sup>

### The Quarrel of the Prefixes

In 1977, reflecting upon the effect on the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns of the intensifying antiquation of the modern itself, immanent to the temporal culture of modernism, Matei Călinescu anticipated its imminent replacement by a Quarrel of the Moderns and the Contemporaries. Ten years later, however, this idea had been displaced by the emergence of the concept of postmodernism.<sup>5</sup> Twenty years further on and postmodernism itself had already succumbed to the same temporal logic (registered in the abstract negation of its ‘post’), leaving a periodizing space vacant, once again, for a now finally critical, but nonetheless ambivalent, concept of contemporaneity.<sup>6</sup>

What this relatively brief historical episode suggests – apart from the inevitable transitoriness of a critical category constructed on a wholly backward-looking temporal negation – is that we might attend a little more closely to the prefixes of critical categories, as constructors of affinity between different theoretical fields within broader frameworks of thought. When we do this, we can detect a series of overlapping relations of dominance as figures of historical overcoming between the operators ‘inter’, ‘post’ and ‘trans’.

‘Inter’ was the dominant prefix of the first half of the twentieth century; ‘post’, the prefix *du jour* from the 1960s through to the 1990s; and now, in the last

two decades, in the wake of the rapid antiquation of the ‘post’, cultural theory is awash with ‘trans’ terms. In fact, the theoretical weakness of the prefix ‘post’ is marked by its status as a vanishing mediation between ‘inter’ and ‘trans’. To take some examples from the fields of art criticism and economic and political theory in the 1960s and 1970s, the following substantive categories were subjected to the following backward-looking temporal overcomings:

Formalism	Postformalism
Modernism	Postmodernism
Medium	Postmedium
Conceptual	Postconceptual

More broadly:

Colonial	Postcolonial
Industrial	Postindustrial
Fordist	Postfordist

If we now add a list of concepts coming to prominence since the 1990s through the prefix ‘trans’, we see that they are mainly transformations of ideas initially grasped, earlier in the postwar period, through the transformation of substantive terms by the ‘betweenness’ of the ‘inter’:

National	International	Transnational
Disciplinary	Interdisciplinary	Transdisciplinary
Medium/media	Intermedia	Transmedial
Sex	Intersex	Transsex
Gender		Transgender
Textual	Intertextual	Translational

To which might be added a further mediating column governed by the prefix ‘multi’: multinational, multidisciplinary, multimedia, multi/polysexual, multilingual, and so on. In this respect, the ‘trans’ terms appear as mediating unifications of ‘inter’ and ‘multi’ as formal designations of the result of placing the referents of the substantive terms into systems of relations.

In fact, the largely adjectival form of the ‘trans’ terms above tends to reify as attributes of objects the movements of the operations across fields – the processes – that they designate and model. These movements are thus better represented as:

National	International	Transnationalization
Disciplinary	Interdisciplinary	Transdisciplinaryization
Medium	Intermedia	Transmedialization
Sex	Intersex	Transexualization

It is ironic that the ‘postmodern’ (a temporal term if ever there was one) associated itself so doggedly with

the claim for a 'spatial turn' *against* temporal concepts. The spatial imaginary of the 'trans', on the other hand, in conveying movement, refers to the temporality of the process of thinking itself. This shift to conceptualizations of processes, rather than objects, explains the associated rise of the prefixes 'de' and 're': most notably Deleuze and Guattari's cycle Territorialization–Deterritorialization–Reterritorialization. This was itself a spatialization of the totalizing temporal dynamics of late Sartre's concept of praxis, in which the neo-Hegelian series Totalization–Detotalization–Retotalization took the form of a Temporalization–Detemporalization–Retemporalization.<sup>7</sup> Yet in its seriality, it too remains equally temporal.

### Art

From the standpoint of Schlegel's philosophical Romanticism, 'art' – for which Romantic poetry in its broadest sense, encompassing the novel, is at once the model and the enactment – is not simply a kind 'that is more than a kind', but *the* kind that is more than a kind. Art both includes philosophy – through the philosophical character of the criticism which 'completes' an artwork – and constitutes it, as one of the 'two conflicting forces' of which philosophy is the 'result': 'poetry and practice'.

Where these interpenetrate completely and fuse into one, there philosophy comes into being; and when philosophy disintegrates, it becomes mythology or else returns to life.<sup>8</sup>

Philosophy is like a 'chemical process', for Schlegel, made up of 'living, fundamental forces' expressed in 'dynamic laws'. It must 'always organize and disorganize itself anew'.<sup>9</sup>

Transposed into the academic context that was about to re-disciplinarize philosophy on a newly narrow basis, this Romantic image of philosophy appears as a radically transdisciplinary ideal. Meanwhile, the Romantic universality of art was broken up into separate compartments by the new division of academic labour. Separated from philosophy (which would residually insist on subjugating it to the sub-discipline of 'aesthetics'), and with its criticism increasingly divorced from the study of its history, not only was the thinking of art divided up into self-contained disciplines (to be augmented later by the sociology of art, among others), but its idea also underwent a fundamental transformation. In the course of the nineteenth century, the most decisive factor was the transfer of the signifier 'art' from literature to the 'fine' (beautiful/*beaux/schöne/belle*) arts;

painting and sculpture, in particular. Literature, the Romantic model of art itself, ceased to be included in this institutional designation.

This was followed, in the course of the twentieth century, first, by the purification of the visual aspect of the fine arts, as their essence, and then, conversely, the internal destruction of that specifically visual character, by a range of art practices pre-dating but institutionally consolidated in the 1960s. At the very same time, these arts achieved an ironic retrospective unification as 'visual', in the wake of that destruction. Yet the only plausible conceptual unification of the new practices remains internal to the historical development of works grasped in their unity by the generic idea of art as such. Thus does contemporary art as a postconceptual practice return us to its Romantic origins. It thereby requires for its comprehension the renewal of the proto-transdisciplinarity of philosophical Romanticism itself.

Whether the educational institutions of art are capable of actualizing such a practice – for all their current enthusiasm for the term 'transdisciplinarity' – remains moot. Perhaps only a Romantic bureaucrat can save them at this point.

### Notes

1. See Peter Osborne, 'Philosophy After Theory: Transdisciplinarity and the New', in Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge, eds, *Theory After 'Theory'*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, pp. 19–33.
2. Friedrich Schlegel, 'On Goethe's *Meister*' (1798), in J.M. Bernstein, ed., *Classic and Romantic Aesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 274; Friedrich Schlegel, *Ästhetische und Politische Schriften*, ed., Michael Holzinger, CreateSpace, Berlin, 2014, p. 141.
3. For a recent example, see Jay Hillel Bernstein, 'Transdisciplinarity: A Review of its Origins, Developments and Current Issues', *Journal of Research Practice*, vol. 11, no. 1, Article R1, 2015: <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/510/412>.
4. Friedrich Schlegel, Athenaeum Fragment 116, in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and Oxford, 1991, p. 32.
5. Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 1987, p. 92; originally published in 1977 (without the chapter on postmodernism) as *Faces of Modernity*.
6. See Peter Osborne, 'The Fiction of the Contemporary', in *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London and New York, 2013, ch. 1; and 'The Postconceptual Condition, Or, the Cultural Logic of High Capitalism', *Radical Philosophy* 184, March/April 2014, pp. 19–27.
7. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Volume 1: *Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, Verso, London and New York, 1976, pp. 45–8, 79–94, 666–7.
8. Schlegel, Athenaeum Fragment 304, in *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 60.
9. Ibid.